

Healthy Deviants Know the Difference Between Normal and Stupid; Sketch Guy

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Byline: CARL RICHARDS

Highlight: There are ways to deviate from normalized stupidity, although doing so isn't always easy. Start by calling out the crazy, from gun violence to environmental sins.

Body

Just because something is normal doesn't mean that it isn't stupid.

Take Halloween. Based on what we know about the ill effects of sugar, it's stupid to dress our children up in costumes and send them out to collect as much sugar as they can. But Halloween is so normal that I would bet dollars to pennies that at least some of you are going to send me emails claiming heresy.

When we engage in these normal, but stupid, activities, we feel fine about it. Sometimes, we even feel good. This good feeling leads to what I like to call normalized stupidity. Once stupidity achieves that status, it becomes almost impossible to criticize.

Of course, letting our kids masquerade as monsters all hopped up on sugar one night a year isn't the stupidest normal thing we do. I can think of a several things that are far more infuriating, and I'm sure you can, too.

Gun violence in America happens enough that it is starting to feel normal. That's stupid. Powerful men treating women as objects sure seems normal now that we're hearing so many stories about it. That's stupid. The United States withdrawing from the Paris climate accord is normal now that the reality of the move has had months to sink in. Clearly not everyone thinks that is stupid, but it feels stupid to me.

We got here because it's really hard to deviate from something that's normal, even when that normal is stupid. I know this is true because just writing the previous sentences was incredibly difficult. Not to mention picking a fight about Halloween.

My friend Pilar Gerasimo has been working on a book and health-advocacy project she calls The Healthy Deviant. Her goal is to help inspire people to deviate from unhealthy norms and conventions and to challenge what she calls the "unhealthy default reality."

One of the first subversive acts of healthy deviance, as she sees it, involves calling out the crazy: pointing out things that might be normal but are also senseless, destructive, counterproductive or just plain stupid. I really like that idea. So that's what I'm doing here.

And as much as I hate to use the words "healthy" and "Burger King" in the same paragraph, the company's recent commercial about bullying is a perfect example of how simple acts of positive social deviance can change the world for the better. It starts with being willing to speak up and intervene in the destructive norms and patterns we witness.

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So the question I'm asking myself, and, now, you, is this: How will you deviate from normalized stupidity? I'd love to know what you come up with. Shoot me an email at hello@behaviorgap.com, and I'll send you a piece of candy.

Carl Richards, a certified financial planner, is the author of "The Behavior Gap" and "The One-Page Financial Plan." His sketches and essays appear weekly. Have a question for him that he can answer in this column, with a customized sketch? You can submit it here. Follow him on Twitter: [@behaviorgap](https://twitter.com/behaviorgap)

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